

Mentors and Youth Development

Caring adults are essential to healthy development. Parents are not the only adults that can take on this role, adults outside of the home or mentors can be very valuable to youth development. Youth that have a positive relationship with a caring adult outside of their home are less likely to display behavioral problems, like bullying, and internalizing behaviors, such as self-harm or depression. Furthermore, their overall well-being is more positive and they are more engaged in school.

The mentoring relationship is a nonprofessional relationship that focuses on providing support and promoting youth assets. There are four different types of mentoring which includes group mentoring, peer mentoring, school-based mentoring and e-mentoring.

Group mentoring is when one or multiple mentors meet with a group of mentees. This is popular among afterschool programs and other recreational programs. Group mentoring is beneficial when resources are limited or recruitment is inconsistent. The group setting also allows for greater diversity and opportunities to collaborate and develop skills for working in a group.

Peer mentoring is mentoring between youth and older youth that usually takes place in a school, which may be delivered one on one or in group settings. Most models of peer mentoring involve a relationship between elementary students and high school or collegiate level students. This model of mentorship provides a unique opportunity for the mentor to develop their own leadership skills. Peer mentoring can also help improve school connectedness.

School-based mentoring is led by volunteers or school personnel in either a one-to-one or group format. This type of mentoring tends to focus on academic improvement, though not always. School-based mentoring is a cost-effective option to improve school connectedness, relationships between staff and students and academic competence.

E-mentoring or online mentoring is mentoring between youth and an adult through online platforms. This form of mentoring is typically for isolated youth as a way to offset barriers due to distance or physical disability. Interaction may take place in real time through video chat or delayed through some type of messaging functionality. Research conducted by the National Mentoring Resource Center shows mixed effectiveness. Future research will explore interaction frequency and other potential factors that could impact e-mentoring, like race and gender.

Mentoring programs can also be designed for targeted youth populations. For example, mentoring programs for youth with mental health concerns are specifically designed to be trauma informed and to reduce problem behaviors. LGBTQI mentoring programs are designed to respond to needs of LGBTQI youth, like potential bullying or conflict within the family. Big Brothers Big Sisters began to develop a pilot program for LGBTQI youth in 2017. Other target populations may include youth of incarcerated parents, immigrant and refugee youth and youth of color.



Not all mentoring programs are created equal. Evidenced-based programs have been evaluated and structured to achieve positive results. Mentors have completed a thorough training and are provided with materials to help them plan activities and progress their mentees' assets. TeamMates, for example, is a school-based mentoring program that uses Gallup Strengths to match mentors and mentees and facilitate meaningful activities. TeamMates and Big Brothers Big Sisters are two examples of evidence-based mentoring programs that are used frequently in Nebraska.

Research of evidenced-based mentoring programs found that youth who meet with a mentor regularly are 46% less likely to start using illegal drugs and 52% less likely than peers to skip a day of school. Youth with mentors also have a "better attitude toward school" and are 55% more likely to enroll in college (mentoring.org). They also are 81% more likely to participate in a sport or extracurricular activity. Mentoring programs have the potential to positively impact any child. If a child is displaying problem behaviors, consider a mentoring program in your area.

If you would like to learn more about the benefits of mentoring or review a database of evidence-based mentoring programs, use the links below.

Sources:

<https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org>

<https://www.mentoring.org>

<https://teammates.org/>

<https://www.childtrends.org/>

Inhalant Use: The Hidden “Drug”

Protecting our youth from risky behaviors is often at the forefront of schools, parents and our youth-serving community organizations. One such risk that we hope to prevent our youth from engaging in is substance use. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the developing adolescent brain is not fully developed until early adulthood (around 24-25 years of age). Use of alcohol or other drugs during this critical time in brain development can lead to difficulties in memory, problem solving and decision making. Substance use can also change the way the reward center of the brain works, making it harder to feel good naturally. As an organization that works to enhance substance use prevention initiatives through education, SCIP strives to provide our communities with information that can help engage youth in conversations surrounding the dangers of substance use. Substances of abuse that should be part of prevention conversations include alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, tobacco/vaping products and other illegal drugs. A less obvious substance of abuse that should also be part of our substance use prevention conversations are inhalants. According to NIDA, “inhalants are mostly used by young kids and teens and are the only class of substance used more by younger than by older teens”.

Inhalants are chemicals found in ordinary household, school and workplace products. They are legal to purchase and may be easier for youth to access compared to other drugs (NIDA). These products include items like spray paints, paint thinner, felt-tip markers, glue and gasoline. While these products are harmless when used as intended, when the vapors from these products are intentionally inhaled to get high, they become potentially toxic and sometimes fatal. Inhalants are used by breathing in the fumes through the nose or mouth in a variety of ways. Inhalant use is sometimes referred to as “sniffing”, “huffing”, or “bagging”, depending on the substance or equipment being used. In Lincoln recently, the Lincoln Police Department put out a warning to parents and school professionals to be on the “lookout for huffing” after officers received reports over a period of two weeks of youth using air horns to get high. Referred to as air horn huffing, the high is achieved by squeezing the trigger of an air horn and inhaling the compressed gas through the mouth.



Inhalants produce a quick and powerful high because the lungs absorb the chemicals into the bloodstream quickly, sending them throughout the brain and body. The high associated with inhalant use occurs within a few seconds. Short term effects are similar to alcohol intoxication (slurred speech, lack of coordination, dizziness and euphoria). The high only lasts a few minutes and as such, the user may inhale the fumes repeatedly to continue the high. Inhalant use is especially dangerous as it is hard to control the dosing. Without education, young people may not realize the danger of this type of high and may not associate inhalants as a “drug” because they are common, everyday products. However, the reality is that inhaling these dangerous fumes even just once can cause damage to the brain or even lead to death. “Sudden sniffing death” can occur from a one-time use of inhalants and is more closely associated with the abuse of butane, propane and chemicals in aerosols. Inhalant abuse can also cause

death by asphyxiation, suffocation and choking. Aside from death, regular use of inhalants can cause serious harm to the brain and body including heart damage, liver failure, muscle weakness, damage to brain cells and nerve damage. Unfortunately, damage to organs as a result of inhalant abuse is not reversible.

If you have concerns about someone in your life abusing inhalants, there are some signs you can look for:

- Chemical odors on breath or clothing
- Paint or other stains on the face, hands, or clothing
- Hidden empty spray paint or solvent containers, or rags soaked with chemicals
- Drunk or disoriented behaviors
- Frequent nose bleeds or sinus infections
- Slurred speech
- Confusion, inattentiveness, lack of coordination, irritability, or depression
- Purchase of excessive amounts of products used as inhalants

It is never too early to seek help if you have concerns someone you know may be abusing inhalants. Support comes in multiple forms and may include: medical care, individual or family therapy or professional treatment for substance abuse and addiction. If you aren't sure where to start, SCIP can be a helpful resource to connect you to school and community supports as well as education. To learn more about SCIP, please visit www.scipnebraska.com.

References: American Addiction Centers; Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health; National Institute of Health; National Institute on Drug Abuse; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)



Grief & The Holidays

“Tis’ The Season To Be Jolly”...We’re smack-dab in the middle of another holiday season...“The most wonderful time of the year”...or is it? For some, it just might be the most difficult time of the year.

Most people look forward to the holidays; getting together with family and friends, reveling in their holiday rituals and traditions and basking in all of the good feelings related to the season.

Yet, in the midst of all the festive and fun-filled activities, there are those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. And for those who have endured the loss of a loved one, especially in the past year, the holidays many times can be very difficult and a painful reminder of their loss. Instead of feelings of happiness, laughter and joy during the holidays, the holidays may bring about feelings of anxiety, sadness and loneliness as the holidays often times magnify the loss of a loved one and may intensify one’s grief.

Here are some suggestions on things you can do to help support another person in the midst of the holidays and grief.

- You can send a card/letter, make a phone call and/or stop by and visit with them to let the grieving person know you are thinking of them and their deceased loved one.
- You may find that they want to talk about their loved one who had died or their feelings associated with their loss. Lend an ear and just listen. Many times having someone who actively listens helps the grieving person work through their grief/loss.
- You should never tell someone that’s grieving that they should “get over it” or that they should “be over it” already. Instead, give the person hope and reassurance that eventually, they will enjoy the holidays again and that you understand it takes time.
- In the meanwhile, offer to help them and/or their family with some of their holiday activities such as their holiday baking, holiday shopping and/or their holiday decorating. By alleviating some of the tedious tasks surrounding the holidays, no matter of how fun they might be, for those dealing

with grief, you may also help alleviate some of their stress and anxiety which in turn may allow them to enjoy parts of the holiday season.

- You can ask them if they are interested in volunteering with you during the holiday season. Doing something for someone else, such as helping at a homeless shelter or working with kids, may help them feel better about the holidays.
- You can donate gifts and/or money in memory of the their loved one. Letting a person know that the person who died is not forgotten can go a long way in the healing process of grieving
- Above all, be supportive and respect the way they choose to handle the holidays and their holiday traditions. Some may want to continue and participate in all their holiday traditions while others may choose to change some of their rituals or forgo some or all of their usual holiday traditions.

There is no right or wrong way to grieve and handle the holidays. Remember, while most of us want to soak up and enjoy every moment of the holiday season, some people are just trying to survive it. Be kind and supportive.

You can find additional information on youth grief and support on Mourning Hope's website at www.mourninghope.org or if you are concerned about a student who maybe struggling with Grief and/or depression, please contact you school's SCIP team and/or visit our website at www.scipnebraska.com

You can also visit the sites below for more information about grief.

<https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/>

<https://healgrief.org/how-to-help-someone-grieving/>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/valley-girl-brain/201604/how-help-someone-who-is-grieving>



<https://www.psychguides.com/guides/grief-symptoms-causes-and-effects/>

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/grief-and-mourning-process-1132545>

mindfulnessandgrief.com/grieving-during-the-holidays/